



William Babel (ca. 1690-1723)

With Proper Graces...

12 Sonaten für Oboe und Basso continuo

Concert Royal Köln

M 56924 (SACD hybrid)

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First recording

musica**ph**on



The London violinist, harpsichordist, and composer William Babel received his initial musical training from his father, who was a bassoonist at the royal Drury Lane Theatre, one of the most important theaters in the English-speaking world of the time. It is certain that he had further lessons with Johann Christoph Pepusch. A native of Berlin, Pepusch had settled in London in 1700 and was one of the founders of the Academy of Ancient Music, as whose director he served until his death. Pepusch was highly regarded as an opera composer (he arranged, among other things, the music to the famous Beggar's Opera) and collaborated at times with Handel. Whether or not Babel had lessons with Handel can only be surmised, but is not at all certain.

Besides the official court orchestra, King George I maintained a private ensemble, the King's Band, in which Babel found a position as a violinist. From November 1718 until his premature death, Babel occupied the position of organist of All Hallows, Bread Street, where he was succeeded by John Stanley.

Babel composed sonatas for violin and flute with basso continuo, and specialized in arrangements for keyboard instruments of arias from well-known operas of the time. With these, he earned a reputation throughout Europe. Johann Mattheson, Handel's boyhood friend, opined that Babel had surpassed Handel as an organ virtuoso. Even the music historian Sir John Hawkins admired Babel's virtuosity; he ascertained that Babel's works could be adequately played by only a very few artists other than the composer himself. Babel's transcriptions of arias from Handel's opera Rinaldo were considered by Handel to be the standard for his virtuoso harpsichord playing – Babel made them from memory, based on Handel's own improvisations in performances.

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